

Assembly Speaker pro Tempore
Christine Kehoe
Chair

Senator Sheila James Kuehl
Assemblymember Jackie Goldberg
Assemblymember John Laird
Assemblymember Mark Leno



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE (#03-09)
Tuesday, July 15, 2003

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LGBT CAUCUS ASSAILS REPUBLICAN BUDGET PLAN

Proposal Practically Eliminates State's Anti-Discrimination Enforcement

Sacramento, CA - The California Legislative Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Caucus today intensified the growing criticism of the budget plans proposed by the Republican Caucuses of the California Legislature.

Last week, the Assembly Democrats rejected the Assembly Republicans' budget proposal that would significantly reduce education spending, environmental protection, and health and social service programs, and would virtually abolish major state agencies including the two primary agencies responsible for enforcement of California's anti-discrimination laws. This plan also failed to get the support of five of its own Republican members. Earlier this afternoon, Democrats in the California State Senate rejected a similar proposal put forward by the Senate Republican Caucus.

"The Republican proposals, if adopted, would dismantle forty years of enforcement of arguably the strongest anti-discrimination statutes in the country," said Assemblymember John Laird (D - Santa Cruz). "Without the Fair Employment and Housing Commission and the Department of Fair Employment and Housing, California's landmark law would be left collecting dust and cobwebs on the shelves. California has a compelling state interest in ensuring that all Californians, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people, are protected from discrimination, harassment, and bias-motivated violence."

The Republican budget plan would reduce \$14.84 million in General Fund allocated for the Department of Fair Employment and Housing (DFEH), roughly 80% of DFEH's budget, and eliminate all funds (\$1.16 million in General Fund) from the Fair Employment and Housing Commission. Republican legislators indicated that the "state is spending millions of dollars to enforce laws that are already protected at the federal level" and that should be a "Federal responsibility."

"The Republicans aren't cutting bureaucratic waste, they're reversing 50 years of progress, making California a haven for discrimination in employment and housing," added Assembly Speaker pro Tempore Christine Kehoe (D - San Diego), chair of the Caucus. "This proposal eliminates essential enforcement tools which are needed to protect against discrimination. The DFEH and the Commission investigate complaints of discrimination and serve a crucial role in protecting LGBT and all Californians."

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"Elimination of these agencies would set our anti-discrimination work back 50 years," said State Senator Sheila Kuehl (D - Santa Monica). "We must fight to preserve the gains we've made."

"California's Fair Employment and Housing Act (FEHA) provides more protections than the federal law," added Assemblymember Jackie Goldberg (D - Los Angeles). "Federal law does not protect against discrimination based on sexual orientation, marital status, medical condition, or genetic characteristics. Without these agencies, Californians would have no recourse but to litigate these cases in state courts, depriving countless Californians of the Department and the Commission's years of experience and expertise in mediating and resolving complaints under the state's civil rights laws."

"At a time when we are fully investing in expanding protections for our community under the FEHA through AB 196, Republicans are attempting to pre-empt our efforts. We simply won't allow this," stated Assemblyman Mark Leno (D-San Francisco).

The LGBT Caucus, joining with their Democratic colleagues, vows to fight for a balanced approach of cuts and revenue enhancements in order to protect education, the environment, critical health and social service programs, and agencies such as the DFEH and the Commission from being eliminated.

The California Legislative LGBT Caucus was originally formed in June 2002. The members include Assembly Speaker pro Tempore Christine Kehoe, the Caucus chair, Senator Sheila James Kuehl, and Assemblymembers Jackie Goldberg, John Laird, and Mark Leno. The caucus' role is to present a forum for the California Legislature to discuss issues that affect lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender Californians and to further the goal of equality and justice for ALL Californians. The LGBT Caucus' formation made California the first state in the country to recognize an official caucus of openly-LGBT state legislators.

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